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Researching Your

# FAMILY'S HISTORY

at the Massachusetts Archives





Published by William Francis Galvin Secretary of the Commonwealth Massachusetts Archives at Columbia Point



#### FAMILY HISTORY



he Archives Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Office is

the repository for Massachusetts records generated by state government. Archives holdings date from the beginning of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1628, and document the settlement of lands in Maine and Massachusetts, the arrival of immigrants, and the development of state government. Public records are not in the holdings of the Archives strictly because of inherent genealogical value, but since they often include references to so many Massachusetts people, these documents are a major resource for people engaged in the study of family history.

In addition to the archival records created by Massachusetts state agencies, the Archives has a limited selection of printed works and microforms to aid genealogists and other researchers. These include basic genealogical reference books, but few printed family histories.

Access to these materials is provided through the Research Room of the Massachusetts Archives at Columbia Point. It is open weekdays, 9 to 5, except on legal holidays, and on Saturdays, from 9 to 3.

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#### Pre 1841

For pre-1841 genealogical research, attention must be shifted to local government records. The city and town clerks in Massachusetts remain the custodians of early vital records for their respective towns. Printed *Vital Records Prior to 1850*, organized by town, are available in many research libraries, including the Massachusetts State Library. A limited number of these volumes are also held by the State Archives.

The Genealogical Society of Utah has an active local records microfilming program; some of this film has been deposited with the State Archives. While the type of records, their format and the quality of the film varies for each municipality, the film includes records normally found in the municipal clerks' offices. Among the records on microfilm are vital records and corresponding indices, marriage intentions, records of town meetings and the boards of selectmen, and early proprietors' records. Occasionally church and cemetery records were microfilmed, along with genealogies. Additionally, commercially produced microfilm of town vital records is also available at the Archives.

#### 1841-1905

The Archives holds the registration books of births, marriages and deaths for all Massachusetts cities and towns, 1841 through 1905. Municipal clerks submitted these registration pages to the state on an annual basis for the vital records generated by their office. While there is some variation in this information, generally the books provide names, dates, residences, occupations, and parental information. Some death records also include the place of burial. The Archives also holds microfilm of added entries and corrections to vital records for the same period. Later records in this collection will be transferred to the State Archives at five year intervals.

Access to the information contained in the vital records registration volumes is gained by consulting bound index books. The books are organized in five year intervals; within each index, the names are listed alphabetically. Reference staff in the Archives will assist researchers in the use of these materials.

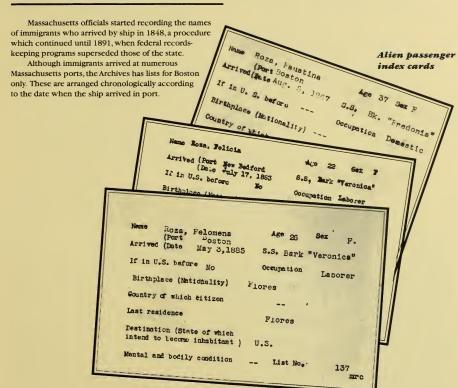
#### Post 1905

Vital records after 1905 may be found at the municipal clerks' offices or the Department of Public Health, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics (470 Atlantic Avenue, Boston, MA 02210). Indices of the DPH registration volumes through 1971 are available at the Archives, but there are no copies of the actual records.

Death registration, town of Yarmouth, 1860

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## PASSENGER LISTS



#### Alien passenger lists

Facilitating the use of the passenger lists is an alphabetical name index, covering the same years as the registers, and providing the same information. This includes the name, age, sex and occupation of the immigrant; the country of birth, and last residence. Also included is the name of the ship, and the date of its arrival in Boston. Children who arrived on the same ship with their parents may be listed on separate cards, or they may be included on the same card with other family members. It is important to note that the passenger lists do not generally provide information about the county or town where the immigrant originally lived.

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## **CENSUS SCHEDULES**

Federal census schedules date from 1790. Recorded on a decennial basis, they constitute a major resource for genealogy. Originally a fairly simple list of the heads of households, the population schedules became more detailed and new schedules were added as the nineteenth century progressed. By 1850, the general population schedules list all individuals residing in a house, and provide data on their age, occupation, place of birth, and value of real estate. Additional schedules providing social and mortuary statistics, and the products of industry and agriculture were also present by 1850. All of the schedules are broken down by counties and municipalities. Large cities are further subdivided into wards, and enumeration districts. Indexes, including the soundex, have been prepared for some of the schedules.

sure the Archives holds microfilm of the federal census general population schedules dated 1790 through 1880, and 1900. The 1890 population schedules were destroyed by fire in Washington, D.C. in 1921, however a special census of Union war veterans and widows of veterans was taken in 1890 and is available on microfilm. Printed indices for the census schedules through 1850, and the War Veterans census, are at the Archives; however we do not hold any of the soundex cards for the other schedules.

The State Archives also holds state census schedules prepared in 1855 and 1865. The information contained in the state census is similar to that of contemporary federal returns, and they are arranged in a similar manner. A name index for these schedules exists for many of the small towns in Essex, Middlesex and Norfolk counties, and Charlestown.

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Register of the 1865 Massachusetts state census

#### MILITARY RECORDS

Military records in the Archives cover conflicts dating from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries, although those of major genealogical use date from 1643 to 1865. The records can be used to identify the service of particular individuals, but provide little background on the person's family or life.

Information concerning military service in the colonial wars (circa 1643-1774) can be gleaned from legislative records, and a variety of military rolls and accounts. Similar rolls from the Revolutionary period document the service of those in the state militia and the Continental Army. Additionally the Archives holds records of state pensions and bounties of Maine land grants for Revolutionary War veterans or their heirs, who were not eligible to receive federal pensions. Family relationships may be included in the pension records, as heirs tried to document their status. Military records from the colonial wars and the Revolution are indexed by name, and are available on microfilm at the Archives. Revolutionary service is also referenced through the seventeen volume set, Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War (Boston: 1896-1908).

Records from Shays' Rebellion (1786-87), a period

of internal turbulence, are located in six volumes of the "Massachusetts Archives" collection. Among these records are letters, orders, warrants, petitions, special reports, military payrolls, financial records and oaths of allegiance.

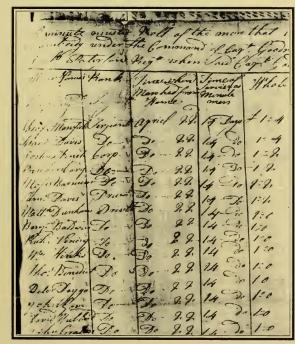
Military records relating to the War of 1812 (1812-1815) are found in the records of the Governor and Executive Council; these are concerned primarily with the formation of militia units and commissions for officers. Records of the Massachusetts Militia in the War of 1812-1814 (Boston: 1913), provides information on the militia regiments called out in 1814 in anticipation of a British attack on Massachusetts.

The most complete list of Massachusetts men who served in the Civil War is found in the multi-volume set, Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors and Marines in the Civil War (Norwood and Brookline, MA: 1931-1935). Archival records include a variety of muster, clothing and descriptive rolls, lists of assignments of recruits to particular town quotas, correspondence from recruiters serving in the south, and materials documenting the use of substitutes for draftees. Other archival materials from this period include the records of the State Military Agent and the letterbooks of Governor John Andrew, an early and strong supporter of the war effort.

Records relating to the Spanish American War (1898) include a small collection of letters and petitions for bonuses from veterans or their families to the Treasurer and Receiver General.

#### Other Military Records

The Adjutant General's Office oversees a large collection of military records. These are particularly strong in the areas of the Mexican, Civil, Spanish American and twentieth century wars. These records are stored in Worcester at the Office of the State Quartermaster, 44 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA 01609.



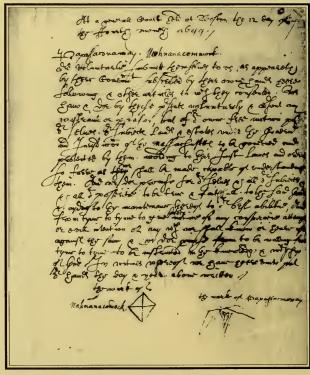
Revolutionary War muster roll for the Lexington Alarm, April 19, 1775.

#### THE "MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES"

The collection of documents known as the "Massachusetts Archives" (or the "Felt Collection") is an important source of records for early Massachusetts, Maine and New Hampshire families. Documenting the development of the Massachusetts Bay government and settlement of its lands between 1630 and 1800, the collection includes original records of the Governor, Council, the General Court, the Secretary and the Treasurer. These cover a wide range of topics of interest to genealogists: land grants; early records of divorces and contested estates; legislative papers, including petitions and remonstrances; military records from 1643 through 1775; records of mercantile affairs; and tax valuation lists, 1738-1786.

The records are bound into 328 volumes, which are arranged in a rough topical fashion. Most of the volumes have a table of contents, and many have been

indexed. A surname/ place name catalogue exists for approximately one quarter of the collection, and a relational database provides name, location and subject access for eight volumes.



Agreement signed by Nahnaacomoc and Passaconaway, June 12, 1644, taken from Massachusetts Archives collection, volume 30

# Papers on Maine

Since Maine was an integral part of Massachusetts from the early colonial period through 1820, there are many records in the Archives pertaining to the settlement and settlers of Maine. The "Massachusetts Archives" collection contains a variety of Maine records dating from the 17th and 18th centuries; the Maine records are not grouped separately within this collection, but are distinguished by county. General Court records, including both passed and unpassed legislation, contain petitions, remonstrances, reports and correspondence relating to Maine from 1780 to 1820. The Eastern Lands papers focus on the settlement of public lands in the District of Maine, and its separation from Massachusetts as a state in 1820. Legal, survey and financial records of the General Court, legislative commissions and records of the Land Office are included in the Eastern Lands papers. Researchers will

also find copies of deeds for land conveyed by the Committee for the Sale of Eastern Lands and the Land Agent, the establishment of land titles in disputed areas, and extensive correspondence regarding road construction, land settlement and the development of Maine's natural resources. The Archives holds indices to several volumes of the deeds, and the correspondence dating 1783 through 1867.

Survy January # 12 1833 Mr Coffin sir want understand that it person has sent to you for 10 22 and I want you to agree with him to lat me have the corner of said lot lying between the new Journ road and the Pond Fairing Ny and No 23 at I juin price as I have made improvement on it according to my first line wich will be about 10 acres and con will oblidge me verry much your humble fervant gre de linte to puntare les sogs he Desplease in Allow 23. That I would not . + pre- 12 months will estand - a there is foliall selecte let att and form. the reducer or grien mite in the bon in But (36 1 Gett Coffe. Mr. thet Carte. Tundager I Horal

Letter to George Coffin, Massachusetts Land Agent, regarding land in Maine

#### PLYMOUTH COLONY RECORDS

Plymouth Colony, also known as the Old Colony, existed as a separate entity until 1686; it was officially merged into the Province of Massachusetts Bay in 1692. The original colony records for Plymouth, including wills and deeds, are maintained at the Plymouth County Commissioners Office in Plymouth. The State Archives holds manuscript transcriptions of these

records, which we service whenever possible through name indices. Most of the Plymouth Colony records, along with the records from the Commissioners of the United Colonies, were published in a twelve volume set, Records of Plymouth Colony (Boston: 1855-1861), available at the State Archives and the State Library.

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Transcript of records of the Plymouth Colony Court of Assistants

# RECORDS OF STATE INSTITUTIONS

Many of the human service agency records held by the Archives document the activities of state institutions, including schools, almshouses, reform schools, hospitals and prisons. Institutional records held by the Archives were created by the following agencies: mental retardation and mental health (originally designated as "lunacy"); public welfare (originally designated as "charities"); public health; youth services; and corrections. Case histories, records of admissions and dismissals, and other registers provide detail on the lives and families of people at these institutions. It is important to note that access to institutional records may be restricted to preserve the privacy of individuals at the institution. Researchers should contact the Archives before planning a visit to use these records in order to determine what restrictions will apply.

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Tewksbury State Hospital intake files, 1906

# JUDICIAL RECORDS

The Judicial Archives, a separate and distinct collection of early court records, is housed at the Massachusetts State Archives. These records are an invaluable resource for genealogical researchers. Among the records held as part of the Judicial Archives are the pre-1860 records of the predecessor courts of the Superior Court (Court of General Sessions of the Peace and Inferior Court of Common Pleas), and the records of the Supreme Judicial Court and its predecessors, the Court of Assistants and the Superior Court of Judicature. Other judicial records include naturalization records from the Supreme Judicial Court (1782-1887) and the Superior Courts, (1887-1922), naturalization records from the Superior Courts and some District Courts as well as probate records.

Actions found in records of Supreme Judicial Court vary widely. Included in the records are cases involving real property, personal property (including personal injury), mixed actions, all pleas to which the Crown was a party, all matters related to the conservation of the peace and cases appealed from other courts. In addition, cases of divorce (1780-1887) and capital cases (1780-1891) can be found in these records.

The county courts, established in 1643, saw all cases involving civil disputes not exceeding a sum of money (which varied over time), and all criminal cases not concerning life, limb or banishment. In 1692 these duties were divided between the courts of general sessions of the peace, which handled the county business and criminal cases, and the inferior courts of common pleas which dealt with civil cases.

Middlesex Court of Common Pleas, 1802 plea of John Richard



To the Sheriff of Our County of Middlesoph bis Under-Sheriff or Deputy, Greeting.

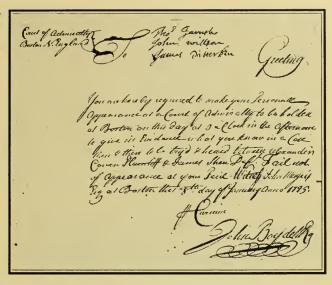
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Admiralty Court, January 8, 1795 summons to provide evidence Middlesex County Court of Common Pleas, writ of attachment, 1730



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Superior Court of Judicature complaint, Suffolk Files, 1730

#### The Suffolk Files

The Suffolk Files contain the earliest file papers of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court and its predecessors, the Court of Assistants, and the Superior Court of Judicature. There are also some records of the county courts, and the court of Common Pleas and General Sessions of the Peace. The records contain cases from Massachusetts and parts of Maine and New Hampshire; this was the result of the circuit nature of several of the courts and the fact that most of the action brought before the upper courts had been appealed from lower courts throughout the region. The records, which were in hopeless disarray, were arranged and indexed over a twenty-five year period beginning in 1883. Extensive indices of every person, place and subject, as well as date and calendar indices were prepared.

#### **Naturalizations**

The Judicial Archives holds naturalization records, which document the process of becoming a citizen, for those people who were naturalized in the state Superior Courts, and some District Courts. The records usually include the declaration of intent, naturalization petition and the oath of allegiance. Later records also include a photograph of the applicant.

Among the information found in the declaration of intent and the petition for naturalization will be the name, address, occupation, and date and place of birth of the applicant; information regarding arrival in the United States; marital status, and the names of children, along with their dates and places of birth.

There is no statewide index to the naturalization records at the Judicial Archives; each court was responsible the arrangement and indexing of its own records. Material from the following courts are represented:

Bristol County Superior Court (1805-1990)

Fall River District Court (1885-1906)

Essex County Superior Court, Lawrence and Salem (1906-1982)

Gloucester District Court (1885-1906)

Lawrence District Court (1885-1906)

Newburyport District Court (1844-1906)

Franklin County Superior Court (1853-1976)

Hampden County Superior Court (1812-1987)

Hampshire County Superior Court (1849-1988)

Ware District Court (1885-1906)

Northampton District Court (1885-1906)

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of admission a citaten or subject; I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States of America and to reside permanently therein; and I certify that the photograph aftered to the duplicate and triplicate hereof as although of me; So mm; as Gon.
Pour sie Claire of George
Subscribed and sworn to before me in the office of the Clerk of said Court,
anno Domini 19 • Certification No from the Commis-
sloner of Immigration and Naturalization showing the lawful entry of the declarant for permanent residence on the date stated above, has been received
by me. The photograph affixed to the duplicate and triplicate hereof M a Ekc- ness of the declarant.  Havnes E. Chilson
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Declaration of Intent, Hampshire County Middlesex County Superior Court (1842-1991) Lowell District Court (1832-1906) Malden District Court (1885-1906)

Norfolk County Superior Court - limited records Dedham District Court (1885-1906) Quincy District Court (1885-1906) Stoughton District Court (1893-1906)

Plymouth County Superior Court, Plymouth (1812-1977)
Plymouth County Superior Court, Brockton (1906-1990)
Plymouth District Court (1885-1906)
Abington and Hingham District Court (1885-1906)
Plymouth District Court (1885-1906)

Supreme Judicial Court (1790-1859)

Suffolk County Superior Court (1859-1885) Chelsea District Court (1885-1906) Boston Municipal Court (1822-1860)

Worcester County Superior Court (1809-1984) Dudley/Webster District Court (1885-1906) Westborough District Court (1892-1906) The State Archives holds abstracts of naturalizations from state and local courts, 1885-1931, collected pursuant to Chapter 345 of the Acts of 1885. These records have been microfilmed; they are arranged chronologically by year, and each volume is indexed separately, making them awkward to use. The abstracts provide the following information about the naturalized person: name, age, occupation and residence; along with the name of the court and the date of naturalization. Although they do not provide much genealogical information, the abstracts are useful in directing the researcher to the location of the original records.

Additional information on Massachusetts naturalizations is available from the National Archives, New England Regional Branch in Waltham. They hold photostatic copies of the original records from state and local courts prior to 1906, which are indexed through the soundex system. Records of Massachusetts naturalizations for the U.S. District Court (1790-1945) and the U.S. Circuit Court (1845-1911) are also held by the National Archives in Waltham.

	ORIGINAL (To be retained by Contr.) Control Courts
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Petition for Naturalization, Hampshire County

#### JUDICIAL RECORDS

#### **Divorces**

Divorce cases have been heard in Massachusetts courts starting as early as 1639. In the colonial period (1629-1692), divorce petitions were filed in a variety of courts, including the county courts, the General Court and the Court of Assistants. Records of the General Court and the Court of Assistants have been published; the original records are available in the archival collections known as the Suffolk Files and the Massachusetts Archives, and in the county courts. During the provincial period (1692-1775), primary jurisdiction for divorces was with the Governor and Council, although from 1755 to 1757, six petitions

were heard by the General Court. Again, the original records will be found in the Massachusetts Archives, the Suffolk Files, the Council records and the county courts. From 1775-1785 the Council had jurisdiction; records are found in the Massachusetts Archives and the Council records.

In 1786, the Supreme Judicial Court was given jurisdiction over divorce cases. Documents are indexed in the "Law" dockets, with files located in the SJC records at the Judicial Archives. Jurisdiction changed in 1887, when the Superior Courts was authorized to handle divorce cases. Records from this period are indexed in separate divorce docket books for the Superior Courts in the various counties. Superior Court divorce dockets for the following counties are located in the Judicial Archives: Hampshire, Middlesex; Norfolk; Plymouth; and Worcester. Most of these records are still

held by the courts, and are not included in the Judicial Archives. In 1922, the county probate courts were granted concurrent jurisdiction with the Superior Courts, but since that date most of the divorces have been heard in the Probate/Family Courts. Records since 1922 are maintained in the counties; an index for cases since 1952 is available at the Registry of Vital Records and Statistics (470Atlantic Avenue, Boston, MA 02210).

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Petition of Abigail Emmery requesting a divorce, 1710

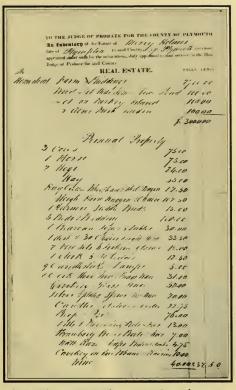
# JUDICIAL RECORDS: PROBATE

Probate records, including the administration of estates, probate of wills and the appointment of guardians, have been under the jurisdiction of the courts since the 1640s. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the probate and family courts also became responsible for adoptions, divorce, name changes and domestic relations. Probate information is found in file papers, also known as dockets, and record books, a contemporary copy of the file papers. These records are indexed by county; there is no statewide index available.

The Judicial Archives holds probate records for the following counties:

Dukes (1690-1938) Essex (1638-1881) Middlesex (1648-1871) Nantucket (1706-1867) Plymouth (1686-1903) Suffolk (1636-1894) Worcester (1731-1881)

Not all of the counties have both file papers and record books at the State Archives; the reference staff has information on the specific records available for research. Many of these records are on microfilm, and researchers will be asked to use this film whenever possible.



Plymouth County probate records, 1841

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#### **Name Changes**

Prior to 1852, name changes were administered by the General Court. Anyone interested in legally changing their name submitted a petition to the legislature. The petition and resulting legislation are held by the State Archives. Also held by the Archives are petitions that did not result in legislation.

Chapter 256, Acts of 1851 transferred jurisdiction over name changes to the county judges of probate. These probate records are either part of the Judicial Archives (see above) or maintained in the county probate courts. Returns of the name changes up to 1900 were sent to the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office. Until 1913, the returns were published annually in the Acts and Resolves. Name changes from 1780 through 1900, including those enacted by the legislature and those decreed by the probate judges, were published in the volume List of Persons Whose Names Have Been Changed in Massachusetts (Boston: 1893). The book, which is thoroughly indexed, provides the following information: original name; new name; date of change; and the chapter number of the legislative statute or location of probate court.

It is important to note that the information provided above concerns only name changes that were authorized by the General Court or probate courts. Many people changed their names informally, and did not record the change with the state government. The names of immigrants may have been anglicized upon arrival in the United States, or the spelling altered significantly, but these changes are not usually documented.

#### Adoptions

Records of adoptions complement the records showing name changes. As with name changes, adoptions prior to 1852 were enacted through the General Court. The petition requesting the adoption and any accompanying legislative papers are available through the State Archives. Chapter 324, Acts of 1851 transferred responsibility for adoptions to the probate courts. Records after 1851 are either held by the Judicial Archives, or are maintained in the courts. The returns of name changes, and the List of Persons Whose Names Have Been Changed in Massachusetts note when names were changed as a result of adoptions. However, many adoptions were not recorded legally. Children were frequently sent out of their families to live with other people, including relatives. Other children went to live with neighbors, but were not adopted as part of the family.

#### Petition requesting a name change due to an adoption, 1851

Jour In Honarable of the General Court were in the General of Proce in the County of Deramine would Respectfully represent that to has an Orphan long living in his family by the name of Tosiah Hamilton I conard which he wishes to adopt as his child and to lake the name of Visiah Hamilton Butts and your littlicres as in duty found will wer fray History Perce Fan 1st 1881

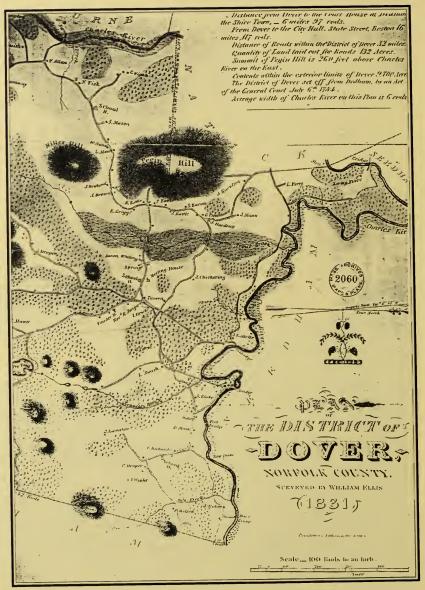
# Additional Genealogical Records held by the State Archives

Other collections held by the Archives, not normally associated with genealogical research, may also provide information on families or individuals. These include the collection of maps and plans and legislative papers. Many maps, especially those of towns in Maine, include settlers' names with their residences or lots. These maps often relate to legislative action or material from the Eastern Lands papers. Legislative records for both passed and unpassed bills include petitions, remonstrances and local documents in addition to the bills. These may provide information about specific individuals, particularly when the legislation concerned the incorporation of a town, business or land grant.

Additionally, Massachusetts Water Supply real estate records include photographs of houses and graves in the four disincorporated towns prior to construction of the Quabbin Reservoir as well as portions of other surrounding towns.



Metropolitan Water Supply, Photographs of real estate takings, Barker home in Prescott, c. 1938



Plan of the District of Dover, 1831







For more information contact:
Massachusetts Archives at Columbia Point
William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125
(617) 727-2816